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AUTHOR Warmbrod, J. Robert
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ABSTRACT

Reports and studies on the achievements of vocational education over the last 10 years suggest that vocational education has not succeeded in offering programs that adequately prepare high school students to enter the world of work. Vocational training in specific skills at the secondary level is not sufficient for future employment since other, additional skills (reading, writing, and math skills and sociability) are needed. The separation between general education and vocational education has a detrimental effect on students if intellectual growth and actual experience are perceived as two unrelated processes. The two areas should be reconciled because general education offers important skills necessary for occupational success. To achieve this reconciliation, vocational education in secondary schools should broaden its purpose and scope beyond skill training and come to a realization that knowledge in other areas is needed in the world of work. This has wide implications for agricultural education and teacher educators if the vocational and educational needs of the student are to be met. A list of references is included. (EC)

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The LIBERALIZATION of VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Presented at the
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by

J. ROBERT WARMBROD, Professor
Department of Agricultural Education
The Ohio State University

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THE LIBERALIZATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Few decades of the past can rival the sixties for significance in the development of public school vocational education in the United States. The decade began with President Kennedy convening a national advisory board charged with the tasks of reviewing the then current national vocational education acts and formulating recommendations for improving and redirecting vocational education. The report of the Panel of Consultants on Vocational Education (1963), *Education for a Changing World of Work*, and the subsequent Vocational Education Act of 1963 re-emphasized the importance of occupational education as a major purpose of public education and expanded the nature, scope, and financial base for federal- and state-aided vocational education. Five years later, the call for revitalization and renewal of vocational education was reaffirmed by the Advisory Council on Vocational Education (1968) in their report, *Vocational Education—The Bridge Between Man and His Work*, and the ensuing Vocational Education Amendments of 1968.

So, within a five-year period, Congress enacted two major pieces of national legislation designed to establish education for the world of work as a principal feature of public education. Proponents of vocational education characterized this renewed commitment to and support for vocational education as a major step toward bringing relevance to American public education.

So, what are the results of a decade of renewal for vocational education? The answers we hear and read are direct but disquieting, especially for vocational education in the secondary schools. The Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (1973) in their recent and controversial report, *Work in America*, blatantly state that "Vocational education in the high schools has failed to give students useful skills or place them in satisfying jobs." They argue that skill training in the high school "invites a too-early career tracking and seldom provides students with useable skills."

In spite of rebuttal to the Special Task Force's controversial con-

clusions (Koo, 1973), they do not stand alone in questioning the success of vocational education in the secondary schools. Researchers who studied a national sample of vocational students three years after they had graduated from high school brand as a "half-truth" the notion that vocational education is designed to prepare people for entry into the world of work (Somers, 1971). They conclude that narrow and specific vocational training appears to have no useful role at the high school level. Others maintain that vocational education in the secondary schools must be more than a training program that has as its prime objective producing efficient workers for employers (Leighbody, 1972). Over six years ago the Advisory Council on Vocational Education (1968) in their report, *Vocational Education—The Bridge Between Man and His Work*, warned that "Vocational education cannot be meaningfully limited to skills necessary for a particular occupation." So, at the end of the first half of the seventies, vocational education is faced with many of the same predicaments encountered a decade ago, especially when the prime objective of vocational programs at the high school level places exclusive emphasis on preparation for the world of work.

AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN

Within this setting I will attempt, first, to advance some proposals that I hope explain, at least partially, why the outcomes anticipated from vocational education seem to elude us still; and second, I will offer a possible remedy. I have elected to couch my comments in the context of vocational education in general, rather than in terms of agricultural education specifically. Then, I will draw some implications for agricultural education. Please note that I am limiting the discussion to vocational education at the high school level. This restriction should not be construed to imply that little importance is given to occupational education at the post-secondary level. In fact, the implication of the position I take is just the opposite.

Before proceeding, let me clear some assumptions that are basic to what is to follow. I begin with the premise that one purpose of public education is to teach students about and prepare them for the world of work. The points I will make are also grounded in the beliefs that the schools have other equally important functions and that the world of work

is not the only factor that makes schooling relevant to students, including students enrolled in vocational education (Howe, 1972; Jackson, 1973). A second premise is that skills necessary for occupational success include the ability to read, write, speak, and listen; competence to use numbers; and the capacity for working cooperatively and harmoniously with other people. The crux of the proposal I will present is that as long as occupational proficiency is considered to be the exclusive province of one segment of the curriculum—vocational education—and general skills and knowledge the domain of general education, the likelihood is slight that consistent and substantial payoffs to vocational education will be apparent.

WHY LIMITED OUTCOMES?

Let us turn now to some possible explanations for what is fast becoming a haunting appraisal that enrollment in vocational courses in high school has a minimal influence on the graduates' performance in the world of work.

Perhaps vocational educators need to consider seriously a possible explanation advanced by Professor James S. Coleman of Johns Hopkins University whose study of public education in the United States was reported in the mid-sixties under the title *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. In his recent writing on the place of schools in helping youth become adults, Coleman contends that schools are best prepared to teach intellectual skills. He goes on to say that when schools attempt to change so they can teach other skills, the results show "that these other activities—whether they are vocational education, driver training, consumer education, civics, home economics, or something else—have always played a secondary and subordinate role in schools, always in the shadow of academic performance" (Coleman, 1972). Actually Coleman's position is little different from an assessment of the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education when they concluded in their first annual report issued in 1969 that a major factor contributing to the problems of vocational education is "a national attitude that says vocational education is designed for somebody else's children" (National Advisory Council on Vocational Education, 1969).

I maintain that this dichotomization of the purposes and content of secondary education into vocational and academic segments is precisely

the culprit that can help explain why the promise envisioned for vocational education has been slow to materialize. A series of rigid either-or philosophical and operational dualisms has been created which impedes vocational education in attaining as prominent a role in public education as many of us would like to see.

The foremost dualism is that of general education versus vocational education. The implication or, more specifically, the contention of the vocationist is that academic courses are concerned exclusively with a person's intellectual, liberal, and cultural education, while the unique concern of vocational courses is specialized, practical education. Another dimension of the separation between vocational education and general education is the theory-practice dualism. The reverence of vocational educators for concreteness, practicality, and experience easily leads to skepticism about or disdain for the abstract, the theoretical, and knowledge for its own sake. This experience-practice dichotomy evolves easily into an artificial contest pitting learning from books against learning from experience. An unfortunate and serious consequence of these dualisms is the illusion that vocational education is most appropriate for the non-college-bound, the nonacademically talented, and the disadvantaged and handicapped.

The schism between vocational education and general education is vividly brought to light in the controversy involving the offering of vocational education in separate vocational schools or in comprehensive high schools. The National Association of Secondary School Principals contends that designating some schools academic and others vocational could lead to undesirable social stratification of students (National Committee on Secondary Education, 1967). Rupert Evans' analysis of Project TALENT data confirms that suspected social-class stratification and indicates aptitude and ability stratifications as well (Evans, 1971a). The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education (1969) stated in their first annual report that "A separate vocational school or a distinct vocational track should be exceptions, not rules, in a technical and changing society." For some reason that admonition reminds one of the sound of a stable door being locked after the horse has been stolen.

The separation of vocational and general education has even led to name-calling between the two camps. I am not sure which group hurled the first epithet, but some vocationists refer to those on the general edu-

cation side of the wall as "intellectual snobs." Some general educators are now shouting "vocational mentality" back across the wall to describe the point of view of the staunch vocationist who exhibits a stubborn faithfulness to a view that equates vocational education with skill training, preaches the dogma that preparation for work is the exclusive domain of vocational education, acts and speaks in a manner that shows open disparagement of general education, attempts to enforce tradition-bound and inflexible program standards, clings tenaciously to the doctrines embodied in national legislation as the sole source of wisdom concerning the nature and purpose of occupational education, and ignores or discounts responsible criticism and questioning. In this day and time, perhaps the more apt descriptive term is "vocational chauvinist."

The fact that we now label some persons as intellectual snobs or vocational chauvinists dramatizes the seriousness of the separation of general and vocational education. If vocational education is to assume its proper role in American education, we in vocational education must be concerned with students' intellectual, social, and cultural development as well as their vocational development. We must recognize that theory and knowledge are inseparable from practice and experience. And above all, we must not equate vocational education with occupational predestination to directed rather than directive occupations.

My point is that the separation of vocational and general education at least partially accounts for the recurring appraisal that vocational education is less than successful in accomplishing the outcomes claimed by its proponents or in achieving the challenges posed by its antagonists. Two limiting assumptions accompany this separatism. The first is the view that the development of occupational skills is the exclusive bailiwick of vocational education; the second is a failure to recognize that general education skills are major contributors to occupational success. These two restrictions fairly well scuttle the prospect for discerning the extent to which a specific segment of the curriculum, be it general education or vocational education, impacts on students' post-school occupational behavior. So, evaluations skeptical of the effectiveness of vocational education in achieving a narrow goal of occupational proficiency are practically assured, if it is expected that specialized vocational skills are so pervasive as to override all other factors that influence occupational success. Surely, general education skills, socio-economic and personal

characteristics of students, economic conditions, and employment practices are among the factors that must be considered when studying occupational success.

SOME ALTERNATIVES

The remedy I propose is not novel, but it is fundamental. I repeat a frequent prescription: It is essential that the barrier between vocational education and general education be removed. That remedy was prescribed in 1968 by the members of the Advisory Council on Vocational Education when they stated "there is no longer room for any dichotomy between intellectual competence and manipulative skills and, therefore, between academic and vocational education." Specifically, I propose that we in vocational education take the initiative in dismantling the wall. After all, we placed as many bricks in the wall as the general educators; undoubtedly we mixed the mortar as well since we would hardly expect them to possess such a practical skill. Now, why don't we demonstrate the techniques for dismantling the wall?

The strategy I suggest has two parts. The first is to broaden the purpose of vocational education in the secondary schools from that of a narrow "trade-school orientation" that equates vocational education with skill training to a more liberal concept that recognizes the contribution vocational education can and does make to a variety of developmental tasks of adolescents. The second part of the strategy is a realization of the fact that skills, knowledge, and attitudes which enhance or impede entry to and progress in the world of work are not limited to those acquired in courses with the label "vocational."

What I propose is a reorientation and broadening of the purpose and scope of vocational education at the high school level. I am not proposing that the goal of developing specialized vocational skills be abandoned; however, I am advocating that both vocational educators and general educators broaden their perspectives and their actions to allow maximum payoff from vocational education as a contribution to meeting the social and personality needs of adolescents. The narrow perspective that the chief if not sole concern of vocational education is the development of specialized vocational skills tends to ignore or discount much of what is known about the psychology of vocational development, the social

and personality needs of adolescents, and the nature of work. In reference to the latter, one only has to read parts of Studs Terkel's new book *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* to realize that for many, perhaps most, work involves much more than the ability to perform occupational skills (Terkel, 1974).

A trade-school orientation to vocational education in the secondary schools is accompanied by some assumptions about the career development process. Some of the more obvious of these implied assumptions are: having made an occupational choice is better than not having made a choice; the earlier the decision is made the better; once the decision is made, it is better to stay with it than to change it; and those who are committed to a vocational objective will outperform those who do not know what they want to do. Experts in the psychology of vocational development label these assumptions as either myths or, at best, questionable premises (Osipow, 1972).

If we would only ask, high school students are quick to cite a variety of reasons for electing vocational courses. Some openly admit that they elect a certain vocational course to learn more about or explore occupations; others say they take vocational courses because they want to prepare for and enter a technical or professional job after post-high school study; a sizable proportion of the students quickly affirm that they enroll in vocational education to prepare for a job; some cite the practical arts and avocational values of skills and abilities developed through vocational courses; and others—to the horror of the vocationist—indicate that enrolling in vocational courses has a direct payoff in terms of satisfying their needs for independence, status, and achievement (Warmbrod, 1972). Vocational educators need to recognize that the major reason some students elect vocational courses is that they are seeking an alternative to an instructional program that to them has been boring, irrelevant, and uninteresting; and to no one's surprise, an instructional program in which they have achieved little success.

The suggestion that the purposes of secondary school vocational education be broadened certainly is not new. Over six years ago the Advisory Council on Vocational Education (1968) called on us to redefine vocational education to include all educational experiences "which help a person to discover his talents, to relate them to the world of work, to choose an occupation, and to refine his talents and use them successfully

in employment." In fact, they adventurously suggested that "orientation and assistance in vocational choice may often be more valid determinants of employment success ... than specific skill training."

Broadened purposes for vocational education in the secondary schools would demand, in turn, changes in the nature and type of vocational programs offered and in the clientele for whom vocational education programs are appropriate. Instead of all vocational courses being organized and taught as if the only legitimate outcome is a student employed in the occupation for which he or she is trained, in addition there would be diverse courses and flexible schedules allowing students to learn about the world of work, explore a variety of occupations, prepare for post-secondary study, develop interests and skills of an avocational and practical arts nature, or simply study and participate in activities that make sense.

A number of analysts, study groups, and task forces have recommended that most if not all students can profit from educational experiences of the type proposed for a broadened program of vocational education (Summary Report of the Summer Study on Occupational, Vocational, and Technical Education, 1965; Advisory Council on Vocational Education, 1968; Leighbody, 1972; Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973). Some who observe the vocational education scene have had the audacity to propose that "vocational education may be general education" in that there is "an educational content in vocational training that should be part of general education for most pupils" (Meade and Feldman, 1966). Coleman, who was quoted earlier, strongly emphasizes that all young people need what he calls the non-intellective portions of education. His proposal would aid greatly in remedying the general education-vocational education gap. Coleman claims that "it is not the *persons* who must be divided into different tracks to learn different skills; it is the *time* of *each* person that must be so divided" (Coleman, 1972).

In his book *Foundations of Vocational Education,* Rupert Evans (1971b) proposes three basic objectives for the public school vocational education curriculum: meeting the manpower needs of society; increasing the options available to each student; and serving as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning. My argument is that narrowly focused vocational training courses tend to maximize the manpower needs objective and

contribute little to increasing the student's options or motivating him or her to achieve in the general education segment of the curriculum.

Allow me to recapitulate briefly. When assessed against the narrowly defined charge to develop specialized occupational skills, vocational education in the secondary schools has not been widely acclaimed as an undisputed success, even after a decade of policy and program adjustments designed to revitalize occupational education as a major segment of public education. I have suggested that a part of the explanation for this less than desirable state of affairs is the general education-vocational education schism that assigns preparation for work to one segment of the curriculum, preparation for life to another segment, and for some senseless reason, assumes that one has little influence on the other. I have proposed that vocational educators take the initiative in breaking down the barriers between vocational and general education. I have suggested that this strategy begin with a liberalization of the purposes of vocational education in the secondary schools and the realization of the fact that occupational success is dependent on other factors including general education skills as well as on proficiency in specialized vocational skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

There are numerous implications for agricultural education that could be drawn. I will sketch the broad outlines of a few.

In the final analysis, teachers determine the purposes actually served by vocational education. Hopefully, we in teacher education have as much influence on teachers' perspectives of the nature and purposes of agricultural education as we do on the instructional strategies they use. Secondary-school agricultural education programs that impact on a variety of students' needs and interests are not likely to result if preservice and inservice teacher education programs emphasize only the meeting-manpower-needs philosphy of vocational education. If teachers are to design and conduct educational programs that allow students to learn about and explore the world of work in agriculture, they must be taught that there are legitimate and significant purposes of vocational education. If teachers are to perceive agricultural education and its activities as a means for developing the abilities, interests, and attitudes of individuals, we must imbue them with such a philosophy.

If we want teachers of agriculture to aid in dismantling the barriers separating general education and vocational education, we must prepare teachers who are aware of the contributions of general education to occupational success. We must equip present and prospective teachers with skills that enable them to help students see how English, mathematics, science, and the other so-called academic courses are relevant to their interests and goals. The claim that a student's enrollment in a vocational course motivates, in some mysterious fashion, the student to achieve in general education courses has little credence, particularly when the words as well as the actions of the vocational education teacher communicate the impression that much of general education is irrelevant nonsense. In short, if there are to be agricultural education programs in high schools that serve broad and varied purposes, including preparation for employment, the rationale for broad-based and flexible programs must be an identifiable ingredient of inservice and preservice teacher education programs.

The conclusion that vocational education at the secondary school level has little impact when measured in terms of the development of specialized vocational skills usually is accompanied by a recommendation that high school vocational courses should emphasize generalized rather than specialized employment skills. On more than one occasion, this recommendation has been operationalized—sometimes obliquely, sometimes directly—as a suggestion that the organization and operation of vocational programs in high schools in terms of occupational categories—such as agricultural education, trade and industrial education, and the like—be abandoned. Obviously, such a recommendation is of more than passing interest to those of us in agricultural education.

Someday, someone who possesses or imagines he or she possesses the necessary clout will attempt to implement the recommendation that high school vocational courses organized by occupational categories be abandoned. I propose that we begin to study the pros and cons of this issue, then formulate and test some feasible alternatives so that we are not caught in a position where our reaction is such that it substantiates the stereotype now held by some that agricultural educators are steadfast defenders of the status quo. I am confident we can build the case that one of the major outcomes of vocational agriculture in the secondary

schools has been, is, and can continue to be its general education benefits, including general employment skills applicable to a variety of occupations.

Broadening the purposes of vocational education in the secondary schools will require diverse and flexible programs in agricultural education. For example, it will require that we take a critical look at ninth- and tenth-grade courses in agriculture. To label these courses "vocational" and claim that their major function is specific occupational preparation is difficult to justify. Why don't we admit that these courses serve a variety of purposes such as orientation to and exploration of the world of work in agriculture, development of practical arts skills that relate to avocational interests, a means for achieving independence and status, and the development of some basic skills and understandings that have application in a variety of occupations? In case we haven't noticed, students have been using these courses as well as eleventh- and twelfth-grade courses for such a variety of purposes for years. Diverse and flexible programs in agricultural education will require that we allow students to enter and exit at various times. That may be an idea difficult for us to accept since our tradition has been that the best vocational agriculture students are those who enlist for a four-year hitch.

In essence, my call is that agricultural educators, particularly those of us in teacher education, become more active and aggressive influencers of the nature and purposes of vocational education in the secondary schools. Specifically, I urge that we not acquiesce to a facet of the "vocational mentality" syndrome that forces all vocational education programs into a common mold. We in teacher education have both the opportunity and the responsibility to influence the future of agricultural education in the secondary schools. After all, what we are about is the recruitment, selection, preparation, and continuing professional development of teachers. If we are really serious about wanting to change and improve agricultural education, I do not see that we need anything more.

SUMMARY

By way of summary, let me review the major points I have attempted to make.

After a decade of renewal, vocational education in the secondary schools continues to be haunted by appraisals that question its value in

preparing graduates for the world of work. I have argued that such a conclusion is almost inevitable as long as it is held that occupational preparation is the sole province of one segment of the curriculum. I propose that the vocational education-general education gap be bridged by broadening what we perceive the purposes of vocational education to be. How can we expect even qualified success when we tenaciously cling to the idea that occupational preparation is the unique function of the vocational education component of public education? The nature of the changing world of work; the technical, personal, and psychological attributes and skills demanded by citizens now and in the future; and the knowledge of how individuals develop vocationally and fashion career decisions make it folly to hold stubbornly to the concept that occupational success will be determined almost exclusively by a part of the curriculum that attracts a minority of all students attending secondary schools today.

Why don't we admit, and design programs accordingly, that vocational education can serve broader purposes—aid in occupational orientation and exploration, aid in career planning and decision making, prepare for advanced study, and develop general employment skills as well as specialized occupational skills? I am not advocating that vocational education abdicate or abandon its charge for developing specific occupational skills. I am advocating that vocational education accept additional purposes that it is well qualified to adopt. Why don't we admit and act accordingly that many skills contributing to success on the job are those learned in the general education segment of the curriculum?

I have called for vocational educators to take the initiative in breaking down the barriers separating vocational education and general education. Specifically, my plea is that agricultural educators, particularly teacher educators, form the vanguard for the liberalization of vocational education in the secondary schools. Earlier I referred to vocational chauvinism. To continue the analogy, now I ask you to join the "vocational lib" movement.

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